

Message Text

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43

ACTION NEA-16

INFO OCT-01 EUR-25 IO-14 ISO-00 NEAE-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00

PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-07 PA-04 RSC-01

PRS-01 SP-03 SS-20 USIA-15 A-01 OPR-02 SY-04 COME-00

EB-11 LAB-06 SIL-01 DRC-01 SCCT-02 SAM-01 SAB-01

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FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1508

USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY PRAGUE PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY ROME PRIORITY

AMCONSUL BOMBAY PRIORITY

AMCONSUL CALCUTTA PRIORITY

AMCONSUL MADRAS PRIORITY

INFO AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD

AMEMBASSY COLOMBO

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LIMITED OFFICIAL USE NEW DELHI 6553

LONDON PASS TO AMBASSADOR MOYNIHAN

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: ELAB, IN

SUBJECT: NATIONAL RAILWAY STRIKE

REF: NEW DELHI 6414

BEGIN SUMMARY: ALTHOUGH RAILWAYMEN ARE BEGINNING TO RETURN TO
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WORK IN LARGE NUMBERS, GOI AND CONGRESS PARTY LEADERS STILL

CONSIDER SITUATION SERIOUS. BOMBAY REMAINS STRIKERS' STRONGHOLD, ALTHOUGH RAIL MOVEMENTS IN MOST OF INDIA BECOMING VIABLE, AND CRITICAL SUPPLY AND PRODUCTION PROBLEMS MORE DISTANT. EFFORTS FOR NEGOTIATED SETTLEMENT OF DISPUTE REMAIN SO FAR WITHOUT VISIBLE RESULT. END SUMMARY.

1. TOP CONGRESS PARTY AND GOI SOURCES STATE RAILWAYMEN ARE BEGINNING TO RETURN TO WORK IN LARGE NUMBERS AND THEY ARE ENCOURAGED BY SUBSTANTIAL IMPROVEMENT IN FREIGHT AND PASSENGER TRAFFIC GENERALLY; BUT THEY ARE CONCERNED THAT RAILWAY DISLOCATION STILL VERY SERIOUS AND STRIKE CAN STILL TAKE VERY NASTY TURNS. THEY SAY THEY ARE SURPRISED STRIKERS, WHOSE NUMBERS ARE SMAZ SWXMNGDXBVEMLCRABLE, HAVE HELD OUT SO LONG.

2. INFORMATION FROM CONGENS AND SOURCES IN DELHI AGREE THAT RAIL SERVICES IN MAJOR URBAN CENTERS AND INDUSTRIAL AREAS, THOUGH STILL SUBSTANTIALLY CURTAILED, ARE BECOMING VIABLE. BUT BOMBAY, REMAINS CRIPPLED AND DEPENDENT ON SKELETON SERVICES. WHILE THERE HAVE BEEN REPORTS OF SOME LOCAL SHORTAGES AND PRICE RISES, PARTICULARLY IN FOOD, THUS FAR, SUPPLIES OF ESSENTIALS SEEM ADEQUATE. IMPROVEMENT IN DELIVERIES OF ESSENTIALS IS PUSHING BACK POSSIBLE DEVELOPMENT OF CRITICAL PRODUCTION AND SUPPLY PROBLEMS.

3. THUS FAR, GOI SHOWS NO INCLINATION TO NEGOTIATE WITHOUT STRIKE BEING CALLED OFF FIRST. STRIKE LEADERS CONTINUE TO CALL FOR NEGOTIATIONS WITHOUT PRECONDITIONS, DROPPING DEMAND FOR PRIOR RELEASE OF THOSE DETAINED. ARRESTS, DISMISSALS, RECALLS OF RETIRED RAILWAY PERSONNEL, AND POLICE PRESSURE ON RAIL FORCE TO RETURN TO WORK CONTINUE. NON-STRIKING RAIL UNION LEADERS TELL US STRIKERS ARE STEPPING UP INTIMIDATION AND VIOLENCE AGAINST THEIR MEMBERS, AND COMPLAIN THIS IS NOT RECEIVING PUBLICITY.

4. ARRESTS HAVE NOW EXTENDED TO AITUC-CPI (INDIAN RAILWAY WORKERS FEDERATION) STRIKE LEADERS (INCLUDING CPI UNION REP ON STRIKE ACTION COMMITTEE). ARRESTS HAVE CAUSED SPECULATION AS TO WHETHER CPI MANAGED THEM FOR SHOW, OR REPRESENT FURTHER CONGRESS-CPI STRAINS. TRADE UNION AND GOI SOURCES SAY THERE ARE SERIOUS DIFFERENCES WITHIN MOSCOW-ALIGNED CPI OVER POSTURE AND TACTICS DURING STRIKE.

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5. SOURCES CLOSE TO STRIKE LEADERSHIP SAY MANY STRIKERS ARE BECOMING DEMORALIZED. DIFFERENCES BETWEEN OPPOSITION PARTIES BACKING STRIKE, PARTICULARLY BETWEEN CPI AND SOCIALIST PARTY LEADERS HAVE FLARED PUBLICLY. PRIVATELY, SOME OF THE MORE MODERATE STRIKE LEADERS SAY DEMANDS WERE TOO HIGH, AND THAT STRIKE, WHILE MORE EFFECTIVE THAN THEY EXPECTED, CANNOT SUCCEED. THEY ARE PARTICULARLY UNHAPPY ABOUT INTERCESSION BY POLITICIANS OF OPPOSITION PARTIES WHOM THEY SAY ARE POLITICIZING AN ECONOMIC DISPUTE.

THESE STRIKE LEADERS ARE ALSO CONCERNED THAT IF SETTLEMENT WITH AN ORDERLY RETURN TO WORK DOES NOT COME SOON, UNION CADRES WILL BE DESTROYED, AND EMBITTERED STRIKERS WILL GET OUT OF HAND AND TURN TO LARGESCALE SABOTAGE.

6. POOR RESPONSE TO MAY 15 ALL-INDIA SYMPATHY BANDH (CLOSURE) REFLECTED WANING ACTIVE SUPPORT FOR STRIKERS. BOMBAY, STRONGHOLD OF GEORGE FERNANDES, AND ALLIES OF STRIKING RAIL UNIONS WAS VIRTUALLY CLOSED DOWN. HOWEVER, BANDH CAUSED ONLY SOME DISRUPTION IN SEVERAL OTHER MAJOR CITIES, AND ELSEWHERE WAS OF MINOR OR NO EFFECT. SIGNIFICANTLY, CENTRAL GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEE UNIONS WHICH SHARE IMPORTANT COMMON INTERESTS AND SYMPATHIES WITH RAILWAYMEN WERE UNABLE TO GO BEYOND WEAK GESTURES OF SUPPORT.

7. WE UNDERSTAND THAT EFFORTS BY STRIKE LEADERS TO GAIN "HONORABLE SETTLEMENT" THROUGH INDIA'S PRESIDENT GIRI, ONE TIME HEAD OF THE PRINCIPAL STRIKING UNION (AIRF) SO FAR HAVE LED TO NO TANGIBLE RESULTS. GIRI HAS MET SEPARATELY WITH PRIME MINISTER AND SENIOR CABINET OFFICERS, AND LEADERS OR EMISSARIES OF STRIKING AND NON-STRIKING RAIL UNIONS. GIRI REPORTEDLY URGED MRS. GANDHI TO AGREE TO SOME FACE-SAVING FORMULA OF RECONCILIATION TO AVOID LEGACY OF BITTERNESS WHICH WOULD LATER FEED UNREST AMONG RAILWAYMEN AND IMPAIR OPERATIONS OF RAIL SYSTEM FOR SOME TIME TO COME. IN ANY CASE, IT NOW APPEARS ECONOMIC STRIKE ISSUES ARE SLIPPING INTO BACKGROUND, AND IF THERE ARE NEGOTIATIONS, ESSENTIALLY THEY WILL BE OVER PROBLEMS SPAWNED BY THE CONFLICT, E.G., VICTIMIZATION, DISMISSALS, AND PAY DUE AND WITHHELD FROM RAILWAYMEN. SCHNEIDER

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